

Identity Theft in Wisconsin: Part two in a Series

Identity theft continues to be the fastest growing crime in the country. More than 11 million people in the U.S. become victims each year. Estimates are that one in six people will become an identity theft victim at some point in their lives.

By acquiring just a small amount of information, identity thieves can destroy a person's financial reputation and cause endless stress on a person and their family. Identity theft costs consumers millions of dollars in fraudulent charges each year, and can take years and cost thousands of dollars to recover from.

Businesses are also harmed by identity theft, costing them not only money . but sometimes their reputation as well. In addition, businesses lose money, both in real dollars and in productivity, every time one of their customers becomes the victim of identity theft.

The Office of Privacy Protection works with Wisconsinites to educate them on how to protect their identities. Since 2006, the Office of Privacy Protection has taught more than 50,000 consumers, businesses, and law enforcement agencies about identity theft and fraud prevention. It also has provided victim assistance to those harmed by identity theft, and helped local law enforcement agencies to investigate this crime.

Identity theft and fraud are likely to be with us for the foreseeable future. Technology and e-commerce enable thieves around the world to steal our identities and use them for financial gain or criminal activity. The Wisconsin Office of Privacy Protection is a valuable resource for all who live, work or do business in Wisconsin. By working together, we can avoid being victimized by this serious and widespread crime.

Safeguard your social security number:

Your social security number is a primary target for identity thieves because it gives them access to your credit report and bank accounts. The more people who know your social security number, the more susceptible you are to identity theft.

Don't carry your social security card with you.

Don't carry other cards that may contain your social security number, like a health insurance card or a school identification card.

Leave them at home in a safe place.

Don't put your social security number on your checks.

Identity theft costs American businesses billions of dollars each year, costs that are eventually passed on to all consumers.

How Law Enforcement Can Help a Victim of Identity Theft

The State of Wisconsin, like other states, requires the police to take reports for identity theft. When a citizen complains they are a victim of identity theft, here are some steps to help victims recover.

Law Enforcement will take a written report. A police report paves the "road to recovery" for the victim.

Law Enforcement will collect and preserve any evidence supplied by the victim, such as:

- Bank statements
- Credit card statements
- Online account information
- Electronic communications

Law Enforcement will provide a copy of the official police report to the victim.

Many creditors require an official report to resolve a dispute. Consumer reporting companies will automatically block fraudulent accounts and bad debts from appearing on a credit report, but often only if they are provided a copy of the police report.

Law Enforcement always advises people to closely watch any and all accounts, especially if they know or believe they have been tampered with or opened fraudulently.

Various Consumer Identity Theft Packets are available as PDF Downloads at:

http://privacy.wi.gov/law_enforcement/theft_packet.html

As more educational materials are developed updates will be made on the above website.

If you have questions or are a victim, you should contact the Wisconsin Office of Privacy Protection at 1-800-422-7128.

By sharing identity theft complaints with the Office of Privacy Protection you provide important information that can help other law enforcement officials track down identity thieves and stop them.

The office provides law enforcement with investigative assistance and helps victims resolve financial issues resulting from identity theft. We also assist victims by providing them with an outline of steps to take and the appropriate entities to contact in order to protect themselves from further victimization.

For more information, contact the Wisconsin Office of Privacy Protection at 1-800-422-7128, visit their website at www.privacy.wi.gov, or <http://privacy.wi.gov/factsheets/factsheets.html>, send an e-mail to: DATCPWisconsinPrivacy@wisconsin.gov.

If you have any questions, contact the Evansville Police Department at 882-2299 or visit our webpage

at: <http://www.ci.evansville.wi.gov/city/services/police.html>

Several informational resources are located on this page including consumer tips, how law enforcement can help, safeguarding your social security number, protecting your identity while shopping, etc.

Sources: Department of Agriculture, Trade and Consumer Protection, 2811 Agriculture Drive, PO Box 8911, Madison, WI 53708-8911

The Office of Privacy Protection:
2811 Agriculture Drive
PO Box 8911
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